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SUBJECT: EU PREPARING NEW HIGH REPRESENTATIVE TO PRESS BURMA

REF: STATE 121789

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Classified By: Deputy Political Minister-Counselor Mary Curtin  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Poloff delivered reftel demarche to European Council Secretariat contact on November 30 who commented on the similarities between our policy points and the briefing paper he prepared for the new High Representative for EU Foreign Policy, Catherine Ashton. While the Council Secretariat and Commission wait for instructions from the High Representative, the EU Special Envoy for Burma continues his preparations for an anticipated visit to Naypitaw. According to the contact, once member states agree to the high-level delegation, the Special Envoy will travel to Washington for consultations prior to traveling to Burma. Poloff also received a copy of the EU's official readout of the Special Envoy's November 20 meeting with Burma's Minister of Agriculture at the margins of the World Summit on Food Security in Rome. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Upon receiving reftel demarche, European Council Desk Officer for South East Asia Leo Schulte Nordholt excitedly pointed out that he used "almost identical" language in his briefing paper for incoming High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton (who took up her duties December 1). Schulte Nordholt said that there is a worry among his Council Secretariat colleagues that Ashton, who is politically aligned with Gordon Brown, will be reluctant to push for engagement with the Burmese regime. For this reason, he said, "It would be very helpful if Secretary Clinton, would even very briefly, touch upon the issue of Burma when she meets with Baroness Ashton. Mainly, flagging your policy review, and expressing the hope that the EU will follow suit ASAP, coordinating with you." Concerned about what leadership initiatives Ashton may take, Schulte Nordholt explained that even discussing further engagement with the Burmese, in line with the US policy review, would not have been possible without the Swedish Presidency's leadership and constant pressure. He immediately forwarded the demarche to his Swedish Presidency and European Commission counterparts.

¶3. (C) The EU Special Envoy for Burma Piero Fassino is preparing for his expected trip to Burma, explained Schulte Nordholt. The Swedish Presidency is expected to politically pressure the Dutch this week to agree to send a high level

delegation. "The EU does not want to be unable to agree to representation if or when the regime grants a follow-up meeting with Aung Sung Suu Kyi," he said. Schulte Nordholt said Fassino is also very keen to meet with EAP Assistant Secretary Campbell prior to such a trip to make sure the U.S. and EU send a unified message.

¶4. (C) Fassino recently traveled (accompanied by Schulte Nordholt) to Thailand, Philippines, and Vietnam to discuss Burma. Schulte Nordholt described Fassino's first ever meeting with the Vietnamese Foreign Minister as "especially fruitful." The Foreign Minister told Fassino that as President of ASEAN, Vietnam will not stand in the way of sending an ASEAN election observation unit to Burma for the 2010 election.

¶5. (C) Schulte Nordholt concluded the meeting by providing Poloff with a copy of the EU's readout of Fassino's November 20 meeting in Rome with Burma's Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation, Major General Htay Oo. Excerpts from the text follows:

"On 20 November 2009, the EU Special Envoy for Burma/Myanmar, Mr. Piero Fassino, met with the Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation of Burma/Myanmar (also Secretary General of the USDA), Major General Htay Oo, in Rome, where the latter was attending the World Summit on Food Security and the 36th Session of the FAO Conference. The meeting was frank and held in a good atmosphere.

Minister Htay Oo stated the meeting should be considered as informal. However, after his return to Naypitaw, the meeting was mentioned on the website of the Ministry, inserted in the report of the Minister's visit to the FAO Summit.

Mr. Htay set out his views on the electoral process with a strong emphasis on stability and security aspects: this, he underlined, was the overriding aim of both the government and the USDA. He stressed that Burma/Myanmar had powerful

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neighbors and thus risked a lot from tendencies of disintegration. Therefore the government made every effort to integrate the ethnic minorities. The August Kokang crisis had been easily solved because the population at large had not been involved. The government indeed worked at avoiding that "ethnic crises" got hold on the larger population. The country's stability had surely improved over the last years; the united and sovereignty of the country would be preserved at all costs.

However, it was not proper for the military to hold on to power for too long. Therefore they would relinquish it next year. It would be up to the people of Burma/Myanmar to choose the future parliamentarians, who in turn should reflect their general will. In the run-up process, a pragmatic approach was needed (the Constitution, approved by referendum, would not be amended).

Mr. Htay Oo turned to the role of DASSK. She was strong and proud, which had led to some problems in her party. The government had invited her to assess possible developments and hoped she would cooperate more. Senior General Than Shwe was ready for dialogue if she refrained from defending the sanctions. DASSK should mainly speak directly to the government, not through proxies." End report.

Murray